

Cal/EPA Environmental Justice Action Plan

Cumulative Impact Efforts Update

September 2005

Status

The project to develop guidance on cumulative impacts was separated into four phases in the Cal/EPA Environmental Justice Action Plan: (1) develop a working definition, (2) inventory existing science-based cumulative impacts studies, tools and protocols, (3) develop criteria for identifying and addressing environmental justice gaps in risk assessment, and ultimately (4) develop guidance for cumulative impacts analysis, prevention, and reduction, along with implementation options.

Currently, the project is moving from the gathering of relevant information on existing cumulative impacts studies, protocols and tools ("inventory phase"), toward formulating of short-term and long-term strategies for exploring the use of cumulative impacts analysis in Cal/EPA's decision-making processes, particularly in community-level assessment of the health and environmental burden from multiple sources of pollution.

Progress

The approach to the inventory of science-based cumulative impacts studies, protocols, and tools has involved collecting information for a wide variety of sources, including state and federal government documents, studies in the open scientific literature, and studies developed and published by community groups.

More specifically, the inventory has included state and federal risk assessment guidelines which focus on the assessment of potential harm from pollutants from multiple sources or by multiple routes of exposure, federal frameworks for cumulative risk/impact assessment, community-based studies which consider multiple sources of pollution, sources of data which may assist in the assessment of cumulative impacts, studies of risk perception, and studies associating socio-economic factors with pollutant burden or health outcome, including geospatially-based tools, methods or studies.

Obstacles

The inventory of current studies, tools and protocols has shown that a single commonly accepted method of evaluating or analyzing cumulative impacts in a geographic area is not readily available. The absence of existing methodology presents a challenge to developing obvious ways of assessing these potential impacts generally, as well as in the Action Plan's pilot projects. Nonetheless, Cal/EPA is committed to exploring the evaluation of potential cumulative impacts in each of the unique geographic areas of the pilot projects.

Next Steps

- Form an open workgroup including government, academic, community, and industry representation to provide a forum for developing innovative approaches to cumulative impacts analysis. Participation would be open and meetings would be scheduled at regular intervals.
- Evaluate existing statewide data sources for suitability in evaluating potential cumulative impacts across California.
- Explore possible approaches to the analysis of cumulative impacts with the workgroups of the Action Plan's regional pilot projects led by the Air Resources Board, Department of Pesticide Regulation, Water Board, and Department of Toxic Substances Control, based on specific needs of the areas under study. Since the pilot projects call for acquiring different types of data in their respective regions, the cumulative impact assessment project will need to consider ways to integrate this detailed community information with data available from statewide sources.